

The Date of George of Pisidia's *Hexaameron*

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George of Pisidia, arguably Byzantium's greatest poet, whose poems recorded Emperor Heraclius' victory in the last war between Sassanid Persia and Byzantium (604–628), has been extensively studied by historians, literary scholars, and art historians alike.¹ But scholars have weighted their studies toward his “panegyrical” works, at times displacing George’s “theological” poetry. Above all, scholars have sadly neglected his longest and certainly most complex poem, the *Hexaameron*, although the disappointing lack of a modern edition and the daunting prospect of plumbing George’s literary sources are certainly intimidating.² As a prolegomenon to future study, however, I hope now to uncover the date and purpose of the poem’s composition. These are vexing problems, for our knowledge of the 630s, when George wrote the *Hexaameron*, is itself rather hazy. And as we shall see, the twin categories, “panegyrical” and “theological,” into which scholars have divided George’s poetry, are, to a large extent, founded on

our imperfect knowledge of the historical background of the last years of his career.

To inquire into the *Hexaameron*’s date and composition, furthermore, it is necessary to challenge one of scholarship’s most firmly held assumptions about the relationship of the generic and historical contexts of George’s poetry. A. Pertusi, the editor of George’s “panegyrical epics,” following the commonly held assumptions about the parallel historical, generic, and thematic evolution of George’s work, placed the *Hexaameron* in the amorphous collection of “theological” works that include the poems *Against Severus of Antioch*, *On the Vanity of Life*, and *On the Resurrection*, and the prose hagiography, the *Life of Anastasius the Persian*.³ All of these works have been dated to the period after the Persian War when George or his patrons presumably enjoyed the leisure to indulge “theological” interests. Yet this division, even if chronologically correct, proposes a somewhat superficial and suspicious distinction: that *all* the poems datable before 630 are “panegyrical,” but *all* those dated after 630 are “theological” is a categorization that rests, when shared characteristics of each group are considered, only on the fact that the “panegyrical” poems can be tied to historical events, while the “theological” poems cannot. One could argue, on stylistic and generic grounds, that *On the Restoration of the Cross* rated “theological” status—after all, one of its main themes is the victory of Christ over death, a theme certainly shared with *On the Resurrection*—were it not that it can be firmly tied to a historical event, Heraclius’ restoration of the Cross at Jerusalem. In any case, it certainly does not fit the definition of a “panegyrical epic” proposed in the 1930s by Theodor Nissen, upon which this category is still based.⁴

I would like to thank Alice Christ for her helpful suggestions.

¹For literary studies, see A. Pertusi, *Giorgio di Pisidia, Poemi, I. Panegirici epici*, StPB 7 (Ettal, 1959), 11–48; idem, “L’encomio di s. Anastasio, martire Persiano,” *AnalBoll* 76 (1958), 7–25; J. D. C. Frendo, “The Poetic Achievement of George of Pisidia,” *Maistor: Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, ed. A. Moffat, Byzantina Australiensia 5 (Canberra, 1984), 159–87. For historical studies, see Av. Cameron, “Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium,” *Past and Present* 84 (1979), 3–35, esp. 22–26; P. Speck, *Zufälliges zum Bellum Avaricum des Georgios Pisides*, MiscByz Monac 24 (Munich, 1980). For art historical studies, see J. Trilling, “Myth and Metaphor at the Byzantine Court: A Literary Approach to the David Plates,” *Byzantion* 48 (1978), 249–63. The following abbreviations will be used for George’s poetry: from the edition of Pertusi, *Poemi*—*On the Persian Expedition* = *Per. Exp.*; *On Bonus the Patrician* = *Bon.*; *The Avaric War* = *Avar.*; *On the Restoration of the Holy Cross* = *Rest.*; *Heraclias* = *Her.*; from PG 92—*On the Holy Resurrection* = *Res.*; *Hexaameron* = *Hex.*; *On the Vanity of Life* = *Van.*; *Against Severus of Antioch* = *Sev.*

²The *Monitum* at the beginning of the text in PG 92, cols. 1383–1424, and Morelli’s commentary and notes are still, amazingly, the most detailed discussion of the poem. On the other hand, the difficulties of such an undertaking are truly Herculean; see J. D. C. Frendo, “Poetic Achievement,” 159 note 2.

³See A. Pertusi, *Poemi*, 15; H.-G. Beck, *Kirche und theologische Literatur im byzantinischen Reich* (Munich, 1959), 448–49.

⁴Th. Nissen, “Historisches Epos und Panegyrikos in der Spätantike,” *Hermes* 75 (1940), 298–325.

Indeed, George's own termini rest on the division between his "theological" and "panegyric" works. Scholarship has implicitly accepted Karl Krumbacher's interpretation that the literary evolution from the fourth to the seventh centuries as "die Zeit der letzten Kämpfe des antiken römisch-hellenischen Geistes mit dem mittelalterlichen christlich-byzantinischen," an "Übergangsperiod" in which a "christlich-theologisch" spirit overcame the Hellenic, at least in regard to George's work.⁵ Krumbacher, in fact, relies on this generic and historical division to argue that George's career ended before the Arab Wars: according to Krumbacher, George's undated poetry, because of its contemplative "theological" character, could not have been written during the Arab Wars.⁶ On the contrary, I hope to show that George used the same set of religious clichés in both his "panegyric" and "theological" poetry, and that it is mistaken to judge the former as political metaphor because it is dated, and read the latter literally because it is undated.

Thus as the political history of Heraclius' reign becomes murkier after 630, so scholarship judges George's poetry as "theological." Yet George's patrons, the patriarch of Constantinople, Sergius, and the emperor, Heraclius, did not change, nor did George's treatment of them; *Against Severus* heaps unstinting praise on Heraclius and his elder heir, Constantine, and *On the Vanity of Life* and the *Hexaemeron* include effusive praise of Sergius that does not fall short of the *Avaric War* and, in fact, sometimes mimics that work.⁷ Certainly, although internal evidence dictates that some of these works, including the *Hexaemeron*, were written after the Persian War, there is no compelling internal evidence, except the assumed division of George's works into historically defined "panegyric" and undefined "theological" categories, to assume that, for example, the poem *On the Vanity of Life* was written either before or after the Persian War.⁸

⁵ K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Literatur von Justinian bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches (527–1453)*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1897), 5–15.

⁶ Ibid., 709–12.

⁷ See respectively *Sev.*, 691 ff; *Van.*, 29 ff, 231 ff; *Hex.*, 32 ff, 1869 ff.

⁸ The occasional similar phrases that the *Hexaemeron* and *On the Vanity of Life* share hardly constitute grounds for thinking them written within a couple of years of each other. The praises of Sergius in *Van.*, 29 ff and 231 ff and the praises of Sergius in the *Hexaemeron* are equally stylized and one can find similar praises of the patriarch in the *Avaric War*, while his description of the devil in *Van.*, 124 ff and 219 ff, and *Hex.*, 711 ff and 816 ff are standard characterizations of the devil as a dragon and a

I do not wish to deny that *On the Vanity of Life* postdates the Persian War, nor that the *Restoration of the Cross* is a panegyric, although it is certainly not a "panegyric epic." Rather, I wish to illustrate how scholarship's generic and thematic categories of George's poetry depend on historical context; the firmer the context, the more "panegyric" the work. George, however, never thought of himself as a "theological" poet, much less a theologian. In one of his rare glimpses into his art, George informs the reader of *Against Severus*: "For I have not possessed the well-versed words of dogmas, but always reveling in your military prowess, have I portrayed the fall of tyrants, the flight of enemies, and the variegated and diverse tales of your labors."⁹ George complains of his own inadequacy in order to praise better his patron Heraclius' universal wisdom: he had no desire to engage in theological speculation.¹⁰ The business of praising one's patron was a technical exercise in rhetoric, and one could well say that panegyric was one of the most circumscribed and structured literary genres of late Roman literature.¹¹ To load unintended meaning onto conventional religious clichés only confuses the social background and political goals that inspired George's poetry and give it historical significance.

Thus if a proposed date for George's *Hexaemeron* can link it with an event, one might be able to read in the religious metaphors of this work, whose vocabulary is often literally the same as that of the

source of evil. Other metaphors, like "pearls" in *Van.*, 118 and *Hex.*, 1644 are among George's most repeated clichés. See for comparison as well *Van.*, 91, *Hex.*, 797; *Van.*, 137, *Hex.*, 681; *Van.*, 163, *Hex.*, 633.

⁹ *Sev.*, 695–99:

Οὐ δογματικῶν γὰρ ἔσχον ἐντριβεῖς λόγους·
ἀεὶ δὲ ταῖς σαῖς ἐντροφῶν στρατηγίαις,
πτώσεις τυράννων, καὶ τροπὰς ἐναντίων,
καὶ τοὺς πολυσχεδεῖς τε, καὶ πολυτρόπους
τῶν σὸν ἀγώνων ἐσκιαγράφουν λόγους. . . .

¹⁰ J. D. C. Frendo, "The Significance of Technical Terms in the Poems of George of Pisidia," *Orpheus* 21 (1974), 45–55, has studied the theological *technici termini* of George's work, and concluded that George had no real theological training or special interest.

¹¹ See T. Viljamaa, *Studies in Greek Encomiastic Poetry of the Early Byzantine Period*, *Commentationes humanarum litterarum* 42, pt. 4 (Helsinki, 1968), 7–29. H. Hunger's advice to the reader of these highly self-conscious rhetorical compositions expresses my own view best: "Die stärkste Stütze scheint die Rhetorik in Byzanz durch ihre politische Funktion gefunden zu haben," *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1978), I, 71; see *ibid.*, 69–74 for the audience, purpose, and psychology of Byzantine political rhetoric; see also the discussion of H.-G. Beck, *Res publica romana. Vom Staatsdenken der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1970), 5–11; *idem*, *Senat und Volk von Konstantinopel* (Munich, 1966), 51–54.

"political" panegyrics, the same topicality that the religious metaphors of the "panegyric" works express. It might be possible to jettison the anachronistic division between "theology" and "panegyric" in George's work, and instead perceive all his work through the same historical lens.

The date I propose rests not only on an implicit historical context in the poem, although I will suggest one, but on the observation that the concluding 150 lines of the poem describe a set of identifiable historical events. My argument is in three parts: the first will explore the political implications of a poem on the creation; the second will propose a post quem date of 633–34, when the Arab invasions had assumed dangerous proportions and had begun to occupy fully the attention of the court; and the third will suggest that the poem was written relatively soon after the coronation, in July 638, of Heraclius' younger imperial heir, Heraclonas.

The *Hexaemeron* is a long description of the world's creation, a subject appropriate for a poet whose most dominant theme in the last half of his career was political and military renewal. The calamities of the Persian War, furthermore, created the need for a new rhetoric of imperial mimesis and renewal that would be appropriate for an emperor whose first fifteen years of rule were the most disastrous in Byzantine history. George naturally compared Heraclius to Christ; his description of Heraclius' triumphant entry into Jerusalem with the Cross ("prepare new palm branches for greeting the new victor")¹² evoked Christ's own entry in John 12:13 and Matthew 21:8–9; the labors and laws of Christ and Heraclius were both written in their own blood, the imperial purple;¹³ and perhaps most appropriate for Heraclius, the Cross was a fitting trophy of victory for both earthly and heavenly emperors.¹⁴ The mimetic theme of creation was also adopted; it became another metaphor for imperial renewal, one heavily laden with

political implications at the court of Heraclius and, more importantly, in George's own writings.¹⁵ The *Heraclias*, George's epic of the emperor's labors, had described Heraclius' six-year campaign in Persia as a military "hexaemeron." Unfortunately, the last part of the poem is lost, but the chronicler Theophanes either directly or indirectly preserved George's extended metaphor of imperial mimesis and creation:¹⁶

And the emperor, who had campaigned against Persia for six years, and secured peace in the seventh, returned to Constantinople with great joy, as he fulfilled some mystical vision in this way. For God, who created all creation in six days, declared the seventh a day of rest; thus also [Heraclius], who endured many toils for six years, found rest when he returned to the City with peace and joy in the seventh.¹⁷

That Heraclius' victory over Persia recreated the world, is, in fact, one of the dominant themes of the *Heraclias*. George called Heraclius "the commander of cosmic rebirth,"¹⁸ and claimed that from his labors, "A second life has been created, another world, and a new creation."¹⁹ George thus embroidered the traditional literary parallelism between God and emperor with an extended metaphor of renewal.

Heraclius' "hexaemeron," furthermore, was not simply a military restoration of the world order, but also a two-fold purification of sin: Heraclius rid the world of the evil Persian king Chosroes, who personified the world's evil, and Heraclius purified the Byzantines and saved them from the consequences of their own sins. Heraclius, who confronted and overcame both the internal and external evil of the world, was repeatedly named by George, not only in the *Heraclias*, but in *Against Severus* and the *Hexaemeron* as well, *kosmorystēs*, the "savior of the world."²⁰ Significantly, the most com-

¹² *Rest.*, 5–8:

κρότησον αὐτὸν τοῖς αἰοιδίμοις λόγοις·
ἀλλ' εἶπερ οὐκ ἔχουσιν οἱ λίθοι στόμα,
νέους προεντρέπει φαινίκων κλάδους
πρὸς τὴν ἀπαντὴν τοῦ νέου νικηφόρου. . . .

Cf. John 12:13: ἔρχεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα, ἔλαβον τὰ βᾶτα τῶν φοινίκων, καὶ ἐξῆλθον εἰς ὑπάντησιν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἐκραύαζον, Ὡσαννά . . . ; and Matt. 21:8–9: ὁ δὲ πλεῖστος ὄχλος ἔστρωσαν ἑαυτῶν τὰ ἱμάτια ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ· ἄλλοι δὲ ἔκοπτον κλάδους ἀπὸ τῶν δένδρων, καὶ ἔστρώννουν ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ. οἱ δὲ ὄχλοι οἱ προάγοντες αὐτὸν καὶ οἱ ἀκολουθοῦντες ἔκραζον λέγοντες, Ὡσαννά τῷ υἱῷ Δαβὶδ. . . .

¹³ Cf. *Her.*, 1.107–9 for Heraclius; *Hex.*, 450 for Christ.

¹⁴ *Rest.*, 30.

¹⁵ Cf. G. Bianchi, "Note sulla cultura a Bisanzio all'inizio del VII secolo in rapporto all'*Essaemeron* di Giorgio di Pisidia," *RSBN* 2 (1965), 137–43, esp. 142–43.

¹⁶ Cf. Pertusi, *Poemi*, 25–29 on the lost sections of the *Heraclias*; *ibid.*, 307 for other parallel passages on this theme in George's work.

¹⁷ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1883), 327–28, which is dependent on the lost third part of the *Heraclias*, of which a fragment of this passage, *Her.*, fr. 54, remains: ὁ δὲ βασιλεὺς ἐν ἔξ ἔτει καταπολεμήσας τὴν Περσίδα, τῷ ζ' ἔτει εἰρηνεύσας μετὰ χαρᾶς μεγάλης ἐπὶ Κωνσταντινουπόλιν ὑπέστρεψε μυστικὴν τινα θεωρίαν ἐν τούτῳ πληρώσας. ἐν γὰρ ἔξ ἡμέραις πάσαν τὴν κτίσιν δημιουργήσας ὁ θεὸς τὴν ἑβδόμην ἀναπαύσεως ἡμέραν ἐκάλεσεν· οὕτω καὶ αὐτὸς ἐν τοῖς ἔξ χρόνοις πολλοὺς πόνους διανύσας τῷ ἑβδόμῳ ἔτει μετ' εἰρήνης καὶ χαρᾶς ἐν τῇ πόλει ὑποστρέψας ἀνεπαύσατο.

¹⁸ *Her.*, 1.201–6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.82–83.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.65–70; *Sev.*, 452; *Hex.*, 1846.

mon context of George's use of this rather rare title was the defeat of the Persian King Chosroes, which was raised to the level of universal salvation in the *Heraclias*: "But heaven, earth, fire, water, air, clouds, and all the cosmos of the things above and below acclaims with us the purposes of God, that one [Chosroes] is fallen and everything is saved."²¹ George, who exploited the literary parallelism of heaven and earth for Heraclius' benefit, had no qualms about exploiting the parallelism of Hell and earth for the vituperation of the Persian king. Chosroes' fall was nothing less than the earthly imitation of the fall of the devil, and George drew on Isaiah 14:12–13, the "fall of the morning-star," Lucifer, as a metaphor for Chosroes' fall: "Now Chosroes understands that his fiery-bright Morning-Star [Lucifer] is darkened."²² Just as Lucifer the morning-star fell, so too did his earthly counterpart, the star-slave: "Let all the chorus of the stars exult, since it displayed the star-slave fallen, even while he was ignorant of his fall."²³ And the demonization of Chosroes was, of course, another panegyric springboard for the Christomimetic exaltation of Heraclius. Heraclius threw Chosroes down from heaven, just as Christ had thrown down the devil: aided by Christ, "through whom you [Heraclius] cast down the enemy who was exalted in his evil, from the clouds into Tartarus."²⁴

Chosroes, then, threatened more than the mundane imperial order. In *Against Severus*, Chosroes, like his demonic counterpart, threatened not simply the Romans' cities, but the souls of Christians as well: "It was not, it was not for the cursed Chosroes to move simply weapons against our bodies, but he wished more to destroy our hearts, to burn our faith to dust like our cities."²⁵ Heraclius, the imperial image of Christ, did not wage war against the Persian king so much as against the demonic agent of sin.²⁶ The *Heraclias* called Heraclius a second Noah, who stood fast not only against the military cataclysm of the disastrous first

decade of his reign, which George as a panegyrist had no desire to recall, but against the sin that flooded over the empire:

And now, the Noah of the new world, found his own heart to be an ark, and arranging all nature within, he carried it in martial order, as he guarded it against the flood of Chosroes. For one could say that all flesh had been drowned in the flood of every sort of sin, until, receiving the branch of the forgotten olive, he saved the remnants of life.²⁷

Thus Heraclius, the second Noah, confronted the flood of Chosroes, and with the "branch of the forgotten olive," peace, brought it to an end. But the flood of Chosroes was apposite to the flood of sin, and Heraclius' victory over Chosroes was even more the victory over sin and the achievement of cosmic renewal.

The demonization of Chosroes, and his personification of the external sin and evil that afflicted the Byzantines, complemented a second theme of sin. Beginning with the *Avaric War*, George introduced the causative role of the Byzantines' own sin; in the *Heraclias* he explained it was sin, not fate, that had laid the Byzantines low.²⁸ In the *Avaric War*, Phocas, Heraclius' predecessor and victim, "the furious and life-devouring dragon of tyranny," infected the citizens with sin and thus wrought harm "even worse than the hydra," for his venom poisoned the commonwealth:²⁹ "But nevertheless, [despite Heraclius' execution of Phocas], his sickness, taking this starting-point from our deeds, raised many struggles between the factions [*merōn*]."³⁰ Later in the *Avaric War*, George explained the nature of this "sickness" as the reason for the Avars' advance and siege of Constantinople itself: "The barbarian treachery did not pursue us, but rather, it was our in-bred sin."³¹ In the *Hera-*

²¹ *Her.*, 1.49–52:

ἀλλ' οὐρανὸς γῆ πῦρ ὕδωρ ἀῆρ νέφη
καὶ πᾶς ὁ κόσμος τῶν ἄνω καὶ τῶν κάτω
κροτεῖ σὺν ἡμῖν τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰ σκέμματα
ἐνὸς πεσόντος καὶ σεσωσμένων ὅλων.

²² *Ibid.*, 1.53–54.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1.1–3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.186–87.

²⁵ *Sev.*, 47–50:

Οὐκ ἦν γὰρ, οὐχ ἦν τῷ βεβήλῳ Χοσρόῃ
κινεῖν καθ' ἡμῶν ὅπλα μέχρι σωμάτων·
τρῶσαι δὲ μάλλον ἤθελε τὰς καρδίας.
τὴν πίστιν ἡμῶν πυρπολῶν, ὥς τὰς πόλεις.

²⁶ See *L'encomio di s. Anastasio*, 35, for Chosroes' description.

²⁷ *Her.*, 1.84–92:

καὶ νῦν ὁ Νῶε τῆς νέας οἰκουμένης
κιβωτὸν εὗρε τὴν ἑαυτοῦ καρδίαν,
καὶ πᾶσαν ἐνδον ἐντεθεικὼς τὴν φύσιν
ἀφήκεν αὐτὴν εἰς ἐνοπλὰ τάγματα
(ἐπὶ) τῷ κατακλυσμῷ Χοσρόου φρουρουμένην·
οὐχ ὅτι γὰρ εἰπεῖν πᾶσα σὰρξ διεφθάρη
ἐκ τῆς χυθείσης παγγενοῦς ἀμαρτίας,
ἕως ἐλαίας ἡμελημένης κλάδον
λαβὼν ἔσωσε τοῦ βίου τὰ λείψανα.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.148–55.

²⁹ *Avar.*, 49–57. The epithet of hydra is used of Chosroes in the *Per. Exp.*, 3.349–59. George made almost no distinction between the Christian villain Phocas and the pagan Chosroes.

³⁰ *Avar.*, 58–60: See the interpretation of this passage by P. Speck, *Bellum Avaricum*, 23, 80–81; A. Pertusi, *Poemi*, 271–72:

ὁμῶς δὲ ταύτην τὴν ἀφορμὴν ἡ νόσος
ἐκ τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς προσλαβοῦσα πραγμάτων
πολλὰς ἐποίησε τῶν μερῶν διαιρέσεις. . . .

³¹ *Avar.*, 120–21.

clias, George included one of his more lurid descriptions of how Phocas had inspired the citizens' disorder and sinfulness: "And since, finally, the furor of the people, who had matured in the drunkenness of [Phocas'] tyranny, endured an internal disorder of the factions, and the City endured suffering from nearly all its citizens, who roiled about in a frenzy as if a centaur."³²

What characterizes George's discussions of the Byzantines' sin and its unfortunate consequences is its political and military context; for George, sin *never* occupies the vague moral ground of lust, greed, or faithlessness, but was a political sickness that sapped the resources of the state. In the passage above, George took advantage of the twin meanings of *meros* to offer the reader a double entendre embracing both the struggles of the Blues and Greens, and the weakness of the body politic. George expressed this identification of political disorder and sin even more clearly in his *Life of Anastasius the Persian*: "And at that moment when the flood of our sins burst into physical flames in our cities, the new Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem and after razing the city with fire, bore away our trophy, the ark of the new covenant."³³ The physical flames of the cities is no abstract metaphor, but a topical reference to the role of the demes in the civil war between Heraclius and Phocas and its aftermath.³⁴ The destructive character of this urban conflict was widely reflected in the seventh-century sources, from the anti-Jewish dialogue, *Doctrine of Jacob the Newly Baptized*,³⁵ to the account of the fall of Jerusalem to the Persians by Antiochus Monachus,³⁶ to the *Miracles of Saint Demetrius*.³⁷ In each case, the devil stirs up the citizens, and plunges them into sin through political

disorder. In fact, in the *Miracles of Saint Demetrius*, the saint's tenth "miracle" is nothing more than maintaining civic order in the city during the civil war between Heraclius and Phocas.

George's poems after *On Bonus*, while they certainly never ignored Heraclius' military prowess, nevertheless increasingly relied on the vocabulary of sin and purification to express imperial hopes of renewal. Divine anger had pursued the Byzantines' sins and led to their defeat; divine forgiveness would follow their purification and lead them to victory and renewal. In this scheme, Heraclius became the funnel through which God graced the Byzantines with divine forgiveness for their sins: "Since you, just like a father, relieved the swelling of all our innermost places because you leached the veins within us of passions, and purged us with your blessed purity, you set in bounds our internal contagion of savagery."³⁸ George explained that Heraclius' mystical power was the power to beg God's forgiveness on behalf of the citizens and, more importantly, attain it.³⁹ Heraclius had healed the sinful citizens like a doctor,⁴⁰ a metaphor that George used both in the *Heraclias* and the *Persian Expedition* to describe how Heraclius had restored order to the army.⁴¹

That the ruler was the conduit through which a god and his people communicated was not a new idea; what is different about George's treatment of this standard Hellenistic cliché is that it is a response to defeat, not a claim of victory. The unprecedented defeats of the previous twenty-five years had left their mark on Byzantine rhetoric; the defeats had been so grave, and so unexpected, that for the first time it became necessary to create a rhetorical model designed specifically to confront its unpleasant reality.

It is no accident, therefore, that the politicization of sin, and George's emphasis on its causative role in Byzantine defeat, begins with the *Avaric War*, which records the climax of defeats quite un-

³² *Her.*, 2.34–38:

ἐπεὶ δὲ λοιπὸν καὶ τὰ τοῦ δήμου θράση
συνεκτραφέντα τοῦ τυράννου τῇ μέθῃ
ἐνοικον εἶχε τῶν μελῶν ἀταξίαν,
σχεδὸν δὲ πάντας τοὺς πολίτας ἢ πόλιν
πεφυρμένους ὥδινε Κενταύρου δίκην. . . .

³³ *L'encomio di s. Anastasio*, 35: ὅτε δὲ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἀμαρτιῶν
ἡ Φλόξ τὸ ὕλινον πῦρ ὑπανήψε ταῖς πόλεσιν, αἰρεῖ τὴν
Ἱερουσαλήμ Ναβουχοδονόσορ ὁ νεώτερος καὶ Καινῆς
Διαθήκης τὴν κιβωτὸν ἀποφέρειται τροφὴν τῷ πυρὶ
προσενέγκας τὸ πόλισμα. . . .

³⁴ See D. Olster, *The Politics of Usurpation: The Reign of Phocas* (602–10), Ph.D. dissertation (University of Chicago, 1986), 225–62.

³⁵ *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, ed. N. Bonwetsch, *AbhGött*, Philol.-hist.Kl., N.F. 13 (1910), 39, 89.

³⁶ Antiochus Monachus, *La Prise de Jérusalem par les Perses en 614*, trans. G. Garitte, CSCO 203, Scriptores Iberici 12 (Louvain, 1960), Chap. 2.3–8.

³⁷ *Les plus anciens recueils des miracles de saint Démétrius*, ed. P. Lemerle, I (Paris, 1979), Miracle 10, 81–82.

³⁸ *Her.*, 2.66–70:

ἐπεὶ δὲ πάντας, οἰκοδεσπότης δίκην,
τοὺς ἔνδον ἡμῶν ἐξεχέρσας τόπους
καὶ τὰς ἐνοίκους τῶν παθημάτων φλέβας
τῷ σῶ κενώσας εὐσεβεῖ καθαρῶ
τῆς ἔνδον ὁμότητος εἰρξας τὴν βλάβην. . . .

³⁹ See *Rest.*, 43–46; Heraclius' "mystical power" is praised by the City and all creation and, following a description of the "folly of the gentiles [heathens]," points to Heraclius' role as intercessor for his sinful people.

⁴⁰ *Her.*, 2.34–54.

⁴¹ *Her.*, 1.122–30; *Per. Exp.*, 2.29–31. The metaphor that the emperor "healed" or restored the army was practically as old as the panegyric genre; see Pliny, *Panegyric*, 18.1.

paralleled in Byzantine history.⁴² Naturally, the idea that God punished sinners in order to bring them to repentance was not new;⁴³ what is new is that this scheme occupies an imperial, rather than individual, context; the Byzantines had not previously applied this model to their imperial self-image, but had relied on the Eusebian rhetoric of Christian triumphalism.⁴⁴ The disasters of the seventh century shook the Eusebian model of invulnerability, and what replaced or modified it was a cycle of political sin, divine punishment, imperial purification, and military restoration.⁴⁵ Thus George's final praise of Heraclius in the *Hexaemeron* juxtaposes Heraclius' own submission to God and mediation on behalf of his subjects with the victories that God bestows:

Bending his neck for their sakes to God, all Persia bent in turn at his feet. Inclining his legs for our sakes at the altar, they trampled every barbarian. Incline your back to the ground below, and the whole cosmos is exalted at once. For thus, let the channels pouring forth sin be closed, and let us all pass by the gloomy clouds of earth with peace.⁴⁶

Although the *Hexaemeron* closes on the same note of purification as George's works after the *Avaric War*, its conclusion is abrupt, and George's request for peace is rather different from the conclusion of the early poem the *Persian Expedition*, the *Heraclias*, or the *Restoration of the Cross*.⁴⁷ The latter two bask in peace attained, and the first requests victory, not peace. Such a difference, while minor,

nonetheless hints that the "channels of sin" have been let loose once more. I will later address whether the empire was at peace or war when the *Hexaemeron* was written. But it is the link between sin and defeat, or even perhaps war itself, with which George concluded his longest and most ambitious poem.

George translated into the vocabulary of sin, punishment, repentance, and restoration both internal political disorder and external military conflict. In the *Avaric War* and the poems that followed, he substituted the literary motives of the purification of sin for the standard military vocabulary of triumph in both civil and foreign war. George impressed the literary clichés of the struggle of Christ and Satan on the struggle of Heraclius and Chosroes, and corruption and purification on the civil war with Phocas.

Thus the *Hexaemeron*'s description of the world's creation fits this martial political context of sin in court rhetoric during and after the Persian War. The *Hexaemeron*'s subject, creation, as we have seen, was a common and easily recognized metaphor of imperial renewal in the *Heraclias* and *Restoration of the Cross*. In addition, the struggle with Satan in the *Hexaemeron* was another well-worn Pisdian metaphor that was the rhetorical foundation for the Christomimetic struggle of Heraclius and the "incarnate Hades," Chosroes.

The rhetorical parallels between the *Hexaemeron*'s Satan and the *Heraclias*' Chosroes raise the problem of George's intent and his audience's expectations and understanding. The metaphors of creation and the demonization of Chosroes had been part of Heraclian court rhetoric since the mid-620s, and were certainly recognizable to an audience that had grown to expect them. The metaphors of sin and victory over Satan in the *Hexaemeron* possessed political connotations that had become ingrained after ten years of repetition. The *Hexaemeron*'s description of creation and the struggle against sin would have retained those connotations, which would have been understood by a court audience. Thus, as we turn to the *Hexaemeron* itself, I will analyze it not as a "theological" work in which George praises the mysteries of creation, but as a poem in which he uses the convenient metaphor of creation to pursue the same thematic interests of his patron that characterize the so-called "panegyric" works.

The creation of the world begins the struggle of Satan and God at the cosmic level; George contrasts God's "imperial" creation of the world to Sa-

⁴²For Byzantine reactions to the fall of the west, see W. E. Kaegi, Jr., *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome* (Princeton, 1969), esp. 176–223; for reactions to the Arab invasions, see idem, "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Invasions," *Church History* 38 (1969), 139–49.

⁴³See note to *Hex.*, 453, col. 1470.

⁴⁴See S. MacCormack, "Christ and Emperor, Time and Ceremony in Sixth Century Byzantium and Beyond," *Byzantium* 52 (1982), 303–4, that victory is the proof of Christian and imperial universalism.

⁴⁵M. McCormick, *Eternal Victory* (Cambridge, 1986), 64–79, 100–11, 247–51, discusses, on the one hand, the purification of the army, an idea as old as Homer, and hardly, as he asserts, Christian (see note 41 above); on the other hand, he ignores the expiatory rites performed during such crises as the Avaric siege and their possible relationship to the liturgically influenced "victory" rites performed afterward.

⁴⁶*Hex.*, 1899–1907:

Κάμψον δι' αὐτοὺς τῷ Θεῷ τὸν αὐχένα,
καὶ πᾶσα Περσίς ἀντικάμπτει τοὺς πόδας,
κλίνον δι' αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ βῆμα τὰ σκέλη,
καὶ πάντας ἄρδην συμπατοῦσι βαρβάρους.
τὰ νῶτά σου σύννευσον εἰς τὴν γῆν κάτω,
καὶ πᾶς ὁ κόσμος εὐθέως ἐγείρεται.
Οὕτω γὰρ οἱ χυθέντες ἐξ ἁμαρτίας
ὄλκοι φραγῶσι, καὶ μετ' εἰρήνης ὅλοι
τὰ στυγνὰ τῆς γῆς ἐκπεράσωμεν νέφη . . .

⁴⁷A future edition may discover the text to be corrupt.

tan's "tyrannical" creation of evils.⁴⁸ Just as God created all creatures, George describes how Satan produced a sin for each. For pigs, lust, for wolves, rapacity, for wasps, aggression, and so on: Satan's creation is a world of sins and evil desires, more than enough to fill it.⁴⁹ George gives full vent to the metaphor of diabolic tyranny in his description of Satan's assault on man but, even more significantly, uses identical vocabulary to contrast the tyranny of Satan with the rule of God: Satan enslaves men, but man is already a slave to God;⁵⁰ Satan leads captive man's "liberated" (*autodespotos*) thought, but man must recognize that he is not liberated (*autodespotos*) from God.⁵¹

God, however, must often remind man to whom he owes fealty, and he does so through periodic chastisements. The theme of the political sins of the citizens, and the subsequent punishments meted out by God, finds its rhetorical echo in the *Hexaemeron*:

And often, although you [God] have stretched your bow, you release the missile, and loose the tension of the string, but you fashion, in appearance, your fear, and you paint the very image of a threat, until the one gazing on the blow, terrified, bends his neck as he goes down to his knees.⁵²

God, furthermore, does more than mime threats; when the sickness of sin arises, he applies rather more caustic cures:

Oh boundless kindness: from one fear, he purifies us of our sickness before the time of judgment, when he applies the purifying fire, and he pricks us with misfortunes that teach, and he contrives a reward for us from sickness, and he accomplishes from the apparent punishment of life, the universal source of salvation.⁵³

As should be apparent from previous citations, the medical metaphor is one of George's most popular,⁵⁴ but the context of its use shifts from his early

works to his late. In the *Persian Expedition*, George describes Heraclius' healing of the army, and in *On Bonus the Patrician*, Heraclius soothes the sufferings of the body politic; in neither of these cases is there the slightest hint that sin is the source of the illness.⁵⁵ But like the *Hexaemeron*, the *Heraclias* does set Heraclius' medical skills in the context of purification; Heraclius is the doctor who "follows the paths of incorruption."⁵⁶

George's description of the citizens' purification, inspired by divine retribution, was, as we have seen, not a simple moral issue but one of considerable political import, and more, in the context of the Persian War, an apologetic scheme for explaining initial defeat and eventual victory. The *Hexaemeron* does not explicitly politicize sin, but the rhetorical parallels between the *Hexaemeron* and George's earlier works are not accidental. The "Christian" character of this rhetoric, moreover, should not mislead us into thinking that the adoption of this scheme constituted a rejection of classical triumphalist clichés. On the contrary, there was no tension or conflict in George's graft of Christian rhetoric; historical conditions had made the "classical" triumphalist rhetoric obsolete. George, depending on the context of his poetry, could use "Christian" and "classical" *topoi* that would appear to conflict only if one imposed anachronistic theology between Christian and non-Christian *topoi* that were adopted to meet the same rhetorical goal.

The descriptions of barbarians in the *Hexaemeron* and *Against Severus* provide an example of how easily George adapted Christian and classical *topoi* for his immediate rhetorical needs. It was earlier noted that George called Chosroes a barbarian, a threat to the soul, and that Chosroes was often described as the personification of the world's evil. But George's rhetorical needs in the *Hexaemeron*, in which Satan actually appeared, required a different model of barbarians. In the *Hexaemeron*, when George set out to magnify the power of Satan in order to make Christ's victory that much greater, George explained: "Indeed, how has he, [Satan], even though he has fallen, such great power that he marches to war not only against the body, like a barbarian, but against the soul."⁵⁷ The contrast

⁴⁸ George specifically explains that Satan is a tyrant who rules through the passions; see *Hex.*, 774.

⁴⁹ *Hex.*, 767–93.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁵¹ Cf. *Hex.*, 797–801 for Satan, with 345–59 for God.

⁵² *Hex.*, 453–64; see a similar metaphor for Heraclius in *Bon.*, 76–78.

⁵³ *Hex.*, 501–7:

᾽Ω χρηστότης ἀπληστος· ἐξ ἐνὸς φόβου,
τοὺς μὲν καθαίρει, καὶ πρὸ καιροῦ τῆς δίκης
καθαριζόν πυρ ἐμβαλοῦσα, τὴν νόσον·
ἡμᾶς δὲ νύττει συμφορᾷ διδασκάλῳ,
καὶ μισθὸν ἡμῖν ἐκ νόσου τεχνάζεται
καὶ τὴν δοκοῦσαν τοῦ βίου τιμωρίαν,
κοινὴν ἀφορμὴν ἐκτελεῖ σωτηρίας.

⁵⁴ See J. D. C. Frendo, "Special Aspects of the Use of Medical Vocabulary in the Poems of George of Pisidia," *Orpheus* 22 (1975), 49–56.

⁵⁵ *Per. Exp.*, 2.191–200; *Bon.*, 84–105.

⁵⁶ *Her.*, 2.31–54.

⁵⁷ *Hex.*, 794–96:

Ἦ πῶς τοσούτον καὶ πεσὼν ἔχει κράτος,
ὥς μὴ μόνον τὸ σῶμα, βαρβαροῦ δίκην,
ἀντιστρατεύειν πρὸς μάχην τοῦ πνεύματος. . . .

here between barbarian and Satan could be said to “conflict” with the Chosroes of *Against Severus*. This seeming contradiction, however, is only apparent. Chosroes was an enemy of the soul, but George needed to highlight Satan as an opponent that was worse than barbarians. George simply had two different rhetorical clichés of barbarians and adopted them for different thematic contexts. The demonic Chosroes, the earthly parallel of Satan, was necessary for the Christomimetic model of Heraclius’ victory, but the moronic barbarians of Graeco-Roman tradition were necessary to magnify Christ’s victory over Satan.⁵⁸

Thus one can see, side-by-side in George’s works, the traditional characterization of barbarians as the enemy of the “body,” as in the *Hexaemeron*, and the seventh-century demonization of barbarians. The rhetorical models they follow stem in the one case from the Greek ethnographic tradition, and in the other from the Scriptures. But there is no thematic or cultural “contradiction” between them. On the contrary, the compositional needs of the poet, in both cases, dictated his choice of literary model: each passage, the one about Chosroes directly, the other about Satan, required different rhetorical models in order to produce the most vicious portrait of each. George’s rhetorical thesaurus included both, and George felt no compunction using whatever metaphor, whether drawn from the Scriptures or Greek ethnography, that was at hand.

Thus much of George’s later poetry systematically adopted the vocabulary of Satan to characterize Chosroes and establish a Christomimetic context for Heraclius’ victory.⁵⁹ Indeed, George increasingly characterized the contest between the Persians and Byzantines as no longer only a struggle between defenders and opponents of the divinely sanctioned political order, but a struggle

of religions. In a lost section of the *Heraclias*, preserved in Theophanes, Heraclius harangued his army that the Persians were not simply enemies of the Byzantines’ divinely constituted empire, but named them specifically the enemies of Christians: “Let us stand against the enemies who have performed many horrors against the Christians.”⁶⁰ Continuing, Heraclius went even further, and declared that battle was itself a crucible of martyrdom:⁶¹ “Let not the mass of your enemies terrify you, for when God is willing, one can pursue thousands; let us receive the crown of martyrs so that time will praise us [and God will give us our reward].”⁶² The conflation of martyrdom and martial virtue is the appropriate corollary to the translation of a war with barbarians into a struggle against the enemies and persecutors of Christianity. George’s prose effort, the *Life of Anastasius the Persian*, did not hesitate to use the victory of the martyr, and the victory of Christ himself, to highlight the religious dimension of the war against Persia and the seemingly miraculous recovery of the Byzantines in the wake of the disastrous loss of the east, Jerusalem, and the Cross.⁶³

Oh paradoxical wonders beyond all; that Christ, seized, was taken to Hades, and stripped the spoils of death; that the cross of the Lord, a captive, was carried away by the Persians, and enslaved the Persian creed, when it threw down the incarnate Hades, the destroying tyrant, [Chosroes]. For it was an image of that first sack of death; thus when the cross of the Lord clove asunder the wall of their error, and redeemed alive the souls who were worthy of him, it freely provided the enjoyment of the true light.⁶⁴

Christ’s defeat of Satan, a victory achieved through initial defeat on the cross, was a metaphor for the defeat of Chosroes, the incarnate Hades, who had

⁵⁸ For the Greek view of uncivilized barbarians, see C. Lacy, *The Greek View of the Barbarians in the Hellenistic Age as Derived from the Representative Literary and Artistic Evidence from the Hellenistic Period*, Ph.D. dissertation (University of Colorado, 1976), 169–211; for the Roman view, see J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (London, 1979), 59–70. The Byzantines, who were, if anything, even more contemptuous of barbarians, were, by circumstances, nonetheless constrained to recognize the great danger they posed to the material condition of the empire. But the barbarians hardly posed what one would call a “threat to the soul.” Justinian, for example, contrasted the uniformity and universality of Roman laws, which, backed by arms, formed the foundation of Roman rule, to the disorder of the *barbarikos ethos*. Barbarism was not a “threat to the soul” but the enemy of Roman universalism, a threat to the mundane primacy of Roman administration; see *CIC*, II, 2; III, 144–45, 243.

⁵⁹ See, e.g., *Rest.*, 21–24, 64–68; *Her.*, 1, 1–5, 190–91.

⁶⁰ *Her.*, fr. 3; Theophanes, 307.4–5.

⁶¹ Certainly heroic self-sacrifice in deference to a god’s command was frequent in classical history, such as Curtius or the first casualty at Troy. But such martyrdom *on the field of battle* was entirely alien to the earlier Christian traditions of both sainthood in general and military sainthood in particular. Thus those who consider George evidence of literary “Christianization” might then also consider the possibility that he was “classifying” the canons of martyrdom, a rather different cultural dynamic.

⁶² *Her.*, fr. 6; Theophanes, 310.26–311.2. See also George’s contemporary, Theophylact Simocatta, *Universal History*, ed. C. de Boor and P. Wirth (Stuttgart, 1972), 3.13.20: τὸ πλῆθος ἐχθρῶν μὴ ταραττέτω ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, θεοῦ θέλοντος εἰς διώξει χιλίους στέφος λάβωμεν μαρτύρων, ὅπως χρόνος ἡμᾶς ἐπαινέσῃ.

⁶³ See also George’s reference to martyrdom in *Hex.*, 489–99.

⁶⁴ *L’Encomio di s. Anastasio*, 35: ὁ τῶν παραδόξων θαυμάτων ὑπερβολαί· ὡς ὑποχείριος ὁ Χριστὸς τῷ Ἄϊδι προσήχετο, καὶ σκυλεύει τὸν θάνατον· ὡς αἰχμάλωτος ὁ τοῦ Κυρίου σταυρὸς Πέρσαις ἀπήγετο, καὶ τὴν Περσικὴν ἀνδραποδίζει θρησκείαν,

initially attained a victory, but whose very symbol of victory, the cross, was ultimately the means of his defeat.⁶⁵

Thus the struggle of Satan and God that runs throughout the *Hexaemeron* is no mere theological abstraction. It was, as we have seen, a well-articulated metaphor for the Persian War in George's work. And when George spares no effort to affirm God's superior power in the face of Satan's threat, the rhetoric reverberates with the panegyric echoes of Heraclius and his victory over the incarnate Satan, Chosroes. When George describes Satan's fall, "He who first fell to earth, Lucifer, inspired a great fear in the creation, because he looked beyond his station, and now, he endures blindness," his language recalls the victory over the "incarnate Hades" Chosroes in the *Heraclias*: "The powerful Persian king, the fire-worshiping Chosroes, has been plunged into darkness."⁶⁶ The fall of Satan, who brought about man's own fall into sin, is, again, described in terms that echo George's demonic Chosroes: "And now, I am in an ecstasy of my thoughts, how the judge declares justly for all; he makes allowance in his merciful fashion; if one falls, he draws the other to justice."⁶⁷ This description of God's leavening of mercy in his justice could refer literally to the fall of man, which has made possible the final destruction of the devil and his works. But the *Heraclias* had explained how the Byzantines' "fall" into sin and the proof of sin, defeat, achieved moral equilibrium through the "drawing" of the villain Chosroes to destruction, using almost the same expression: "One is fallen and all are saved."⁶⁸

George initially demonized Chosroes because he

had need of a rhetorical model that permitted him to explain somehow his patron's first decade of military catastrophe. Certainly, in his earliest poems, George did his best to avoid any mention of defeat whatsoever. Defeat was generally avoided in Byzantine panegyric (unless of course, the defeated, like Valens, was a heretic, like Julian, an apostate, or like Phocas, one's recently overthrown and executed predecessor); defeat was an admission of an opponent's religious or moral superiority, an admission the Byzantines would not concede. But the appearance of the Avars before the walls of Constantinople and the occupation of the eastern shore by the Persians were evidence of defeat too great for even George to ignore, but for which the thesaurus of traditional panegyric, for obvious reasons, had no models. Defeat, moreover, had to stem from the Byzantines themselves; it was unconscionable that anyone could impose defeat on God's people without his permission, and God would only allow it if provoked by the Byzantines' sins.

Thus the *Hexaemeron* pursues the same thematic goals and employs much of the same rhetoric as the "panegyric" poems. It is, in fact, no more a theological discourse on creation than the beginning of Constantine Manasses' verse world chronicle. On the contrary, it praises the rule and righteousness of the emperor through its rather involved literary mimesis of heavenly and earthly empires. The climax of this panegyric conceit is the *Hexaemeron*'s concluding 150 lines. It is, for the most part, a long prayer set by George in the mouth of Patriarch Sergius, which reinforces the parallelism of heaven and earth. It does this through its structural division into a final discussion of heavenly power and then its mimesis, the imperial. George highlights this literary structure by opening each section with the same invocation: "But oh architect of so many great wonders. . . ."⁶⁹ He addresses, however, not Christ but God the Father, who "for the sake of [his] unruly servants" sacrificed his son,⁷⁰ Christ, the mediator between God the Father and man, the means through which man knows "the guarantee of his inheritance, the predestined end of his adoption."⁷¹ George describes and praises the glory of the Word, the miracle of his incarnation, and the miracles Christ performed while incarnate. But the better part of this discussion is given over to Christ

τὸν ἑσασαρχὸν Ἀθὴν καταλαβὼν τὸν ἀλάστορα τύραννον. εἰκὼν γὰρ ἦν τὸ γινόμενον τῆς πρώτης τοῦ θανάτου πορθέσεως.

⁶⁵ See *Rest.*, 10–14, in which the return of the cross constitutes the proof that Christianity is true. Moreover, as V. Grumel explained, Heraclius' cross fetish appears only *after* the Persian War's conclusion, and must be seen as part of a propaganda campaign. Exactly when he brought the Cross to Jerusalem and precisely what he was promoting (besides himself) has provoked extensive controversy; see A. Frolov, "La vraie croix et les expéditions d'Héraclius en Perse," *REB* 11 (1953), 88–105; V. Grumel, "La reposition de la vraie croix à Jérusalem par Héraclius. Le jour et l'année," *ByzF* 1 (1966), 139–49; C. Mango, "Deux études sur Byzance et la Perse Sassanide," *TM* 9 (1985), 105–17; P. Speck, *Das geteilte Dossier*, *Poikila byzantina* 9 (Bonn, 1988), 356–72 in particular.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Hex.*, 1509–10 with *Her.*, 1.13–14.

⁶⁷ *Hex.*, 418–21:

Καὶ γίνομαι νῦν τῶν φρενῶν ἐν ἐκστάσει
πῶς ὁ κριτὴς δίκαια θεοπιζῶν ὅλοις,
προσωπολήπτει, καὶ φιλανθρώπῳ σχέσει,
ἄλλου σφαλέντος, ἄλλον ἔλκει πρὸς δίκην. . . .

⁶⁸ *Her.*, 1.53.

⁶⁹ *Hex.*, 1766, 1838.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1767–69.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1783, 1786.

the Victor, the weapon forged by the Father, “through whom the phalanx of the demons are put to flight.”⁷² George, who used the metaphor of creation to express the power and authority of God, concluded his discussion of the heavenly realm by recalling Christ’s victory over Satan in the contest of heaven and Hell:

And beyond hope, Hades died, and Pluto became a pauper, and the slayer was slain; for he withered when he vomited up the dead whom he held, whom he, swollen, had held tight below in his soul-destroying embrace, until your off-spring, the life-bearer, the Father’s light, the lightning-flash before the sun, the new infant of ancient days, killed him with the wood instead of a lance.⁷³

The victory of Christ over the devil, a “recreation” or renewal of the world through victory, concludes this section, and prepares the reader for the parallel imperial victory in the next section. For as we have already seen, the victory over Chosroes, also defeated “with the wood,” was the earthly parallel of the defeat of Satan, and was described in nearly the same words. Thus victory over Satan and the relationship of the Father and the Son are the twin themes with which George concludes his discussion of the divine sphere; they are the same themes that he highlights in his concluding praise of Heraclius.

The last section of the poem recapitulates the themes of sin and repentance, and the parallelism of heaven and earth. In addition, it echoes the theme of unity between father and son found in the previous section, and adapts it for Heraclius’ dynastic needs.⁷⁴ Such a *topos* had, in fact, long existed in panegyric rhetoric. Over three centuries earlier, Eusebius had introduced a trinitarian metaphor into dynastic rhetoric when he acclaimed Crispus, the erstwhile heir of Constantine, “similar [*homoios*] in every way to his father,” thus bringing his own Arian cliché, *homoiousios*, to panegyric expression.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid., 1805.

⁷³ Ibid., 1829–37:

Καὶ νεκρὸς ἄδης γίνεται παρ’ ἐλπίδα,
πλοῦτων πενιχρὸς, καὶ σφαγεὺς ἐσφαγμένος·
μαραίνεται γὰρ τοὺς νεκροὺς ἀναπτύων,
οὗς εἶχεν, οὗς ἐσφίξε κολπώσας κάτω
ἐν ταῖς ἑαυτοῦ ψυχολέθροις ἀγκάλαις·
ἕως τὸ σὸν γέννημα, τὸ ζωηφόρον,
τὸ Πατρικὸν φῶς, τὸ πρὸ ἡλίου σέλας,
τὸ τῶν παλαιῶν ἡμερῶν νέον βρέφος,
ἀνείλεν αὐτόν, ἀντὶ λόγῃς τῷ ξύλῳ.

⁷⁴ See D. Olster, “The Dynastic Iconography of Heraclius’ Early Coinage,” *JOB* 32, 2 (1982), 399–408.

⁷⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. H. J. Lawler (Cambridge, 1973), 478. The divine father-son metaphor for succession, of

George introduces this section with the same invocation to the “architect of so many great wonders” that he used to introduce the praise of Christ’s power. Furthermore, his choice of speaker hints that the likely context of Sergius’ speech is the liturgy. Heraclius is not simply present in the city, but in the presence of both Sergius and God:

Oh architect of so many great wonders, [God], you who hold tight the heavenly doors with your will when it is necessary, and again, open them when you consider it propitious, whenever he [Heraclius] stands close at hand, even as now, when he is present, he has opened the lower gates. For we call this city, which you have raised, the gates of worldly dwellers. And give the one who has received his power from you, the *kosmorystēs*, the punisher of Persia, and more, the savior of Persia, to rule all the land under the sun. Show the land to be the mirror of heaven, because one sun rules, even over earthly affairs. For it is fitting that the one who appeared the Persian slayer become the universal lord.⁷⁶

Sergius’ speech reiterates that it is God who can either open or close the doors of heaven to man, punish or reward his followers, but that when properly approached by Heraclius, heaven’s doors open for his favorite. The gates of the earth, Constantinople, are at once the center and source of the empire’s mimetic, universal rule, and the lower gates through which the subjects of Rome are brought to those above. But the most striking instance of the mimesis of Heraclius and Christ is that their mutual claims to universal authority are founded on their victories over the twin menaces, Satan and Chosroes. As already mentioned, George exploited the traditional parallelism of heavenly and earthly emperors, to create a similar parallelism of heavenly and earthly antagonists.

course, was hardly Christian. On the contrary, it was one of Hellenistic kingship’s most cherished conceits; the tetrarchs and inspirers of the Great Persecution, Diocletian and Maximianus, were linked together by their bond as Jovius and Herculus.

⁷⁶ *Hex.*, 1838–52:

Ἄλλ’ ὃ τοσούτων ἀρχιτέκτων θαυμάτων!
ὁ πρὸς τὸ σὸν βούλημα τὰς ἄνω πύλας
σφίγγων, ὅτε χρῆ, καὶ διευρύνων πάλιν,
ὅταν παραστῇ καὶ δοκεῖ σοι συμφέρειν,
καὶ νῦν παρὼν ἀνοίγει τὰς κάτω πύλας.
Πύλας γὰρ ἡμεῖς κοσμικῶν οἰκητόρων
ταύτην καλοῦμεν, ἣν ἐπύργωσας πόλιν·
καὶ δὸς τὸν ἐκ σοῦ προσλαβόντα τὸ κράτος,
τὸν κοσμορῦστην, τὸν διώκτην Περσίδος,
μᾶλλον δὲ τὸν σώσαντα καὶ τὴν Περσίδα,
ὅλον κρατῆσαι τὸν ὑφ’ ἡλίον τόπον.
Δείξον δὲ τὴν γῆν οὐρανὸν μιμουμένην,
ἐνδὸς κρατούντος ἡλίου καὶ τῶν κάτω.
τὸν γὰρ φανέντα Περσικὸν κοσμοκτόνον,
πρέπει γενέσθαι κοσμικὸν καὶ δεσπότην.

Just as the victory over Satan illustrates Christ's great power, so Heraclius' victory over the earthly Satan proves his fitness to assume earthly universal authority.

This passage, however, aside from its thematic interest, also holds a key to the date of the poem. The poem refers specifically to Heraclius' presence in Constantinople, and, in the light of Heraclius' extensive campaigns and travels, this limits the times at which the poem could have been composed. In the years after the Persian War, that is, after 628, he was in Constantinople for a brief stay sometime during 628–29, and had certainly returned to the east, whence he had visited the capital, by fall of 629. In 630 he returned the Cross to Jerusalem, and by 631 was reorganizing the provinces of the east and engaging in negotiations with the Jacobite Patriarch Athanasius. He visited Constantinople, possibly in late 631 to celebrate the baptism of his elder son Constantine's first son, and definitely in early 632, the year of Constantine's elevation to the consulship and the elevation of a second son, Heraclonas, to Caesar. But he does not seem to have stayed in Constantinople long, for by late 632 he was back in the east, and in early 633 he personally directed the unification of the Armenian and imperial churches at a synod in Armenia. By the middle of 633, he was occupied with the Arab War. Thus the *Hexaemeron* could have been written only during or shortly after Heraclius' residence at the capital in 628–29, 631–32, or after 636.⁷⁷

After his lengthy paean of victory for Heraclius' "salvation" of Persia, George leaves behind Heraclius' glories in the Persian War, and hurries on to assure the audience that Heraclius' victories in Persia will be succeeded by a "second" victory: "Increase in him the power of your fear. For thus he will have a faithful reward of victory, who has been made worthy of a second victory against our enemies, so that he will burn down the obscure barbarians."⁷⁸ The first victory to which George refers is the Persian triumph, which George had introduced only a few lines before. The "second victory," then, while conceivably a generic *topos*, would seem to refer to a different military conflict. And

the label "obscure [*adēlous*] barbarians" points in the direction of the Arabs.⁷⁹

Certainly one of the most shocking aspects of the Arab successes for the Byzantines was that, although they had been imperial allies (and enemies) for some centuries, their sudden success was without precedent or expectation. They had never been, like the Persians, a traditional and well-known enemy whom centuries of conflict had accustomed the Byzantines to consider the great threat of the east.⁸⁰ The Arabs' sudden and violent eruption may well have seemed providential. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that George's wish for a victory by Heraclius over the Arabs could have been written before 633, for there was only a negligible or, perhaps more accurately, only a local Arab threat before then. The Byzantine governor of south Palestine had crushed an Arab incursion at Mu'ta in 629 without much fanfare, and it was not until 633 that the Arabs returned in force and attracted the emperor's personal attention. Thus if the "obscure barbarians" of the *Hexaemeron* are the Arabs, the poem could not have been written before 633, and in the light of Heraclius' itinerary, it could not have been written before 636.⁸¹

George thereafter moves from the theme of vic-

⁷⁹I prefer the manuscript reading to the emendation *adoulos*, unenslaved (PG, col. 1576, note 1858). The editor understands "unenslaved" to imply "unenslaved to God," but the Persian victory that supplies the context clearly implies "unenslaved by Heraclius," which would also be a reference to the Arabs. Thus, although I prefer the manuscript reading, both readings can be understood to refer to the Arabs. It should not be surprising that George did not mention the Arabs by name, but rather identified them only as "barbarians." It was his common practice not to dignify barbarians with a name; see *In Her.*, 21, where he referred to the "Medes and barbarians [Avars]," or *Bon.*, 144, *Avar.*, 24, 37, 109, 121, 142, etc., where the Avars were again unnamed barbarians. George was as casually contemptuous of the Arabs, as in *Per. Exp.*, 2.238, where he called the Saracens (who were known from the context) "faithless barbarians." George's attitude toward the Arabs was hardly uncharacteristic of the Byzantines. Theophanes, 35–36 narrated how the *dux* of Palestine heaped insults on the Arabs who had come to collect their stipends, calling them "dogs."

⁸⁰For Byzantine relations with the Arabs in the late Roman period, see I. Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, D.C., 1984); for the shock that the Byzantines felt toward the Arabs' successes, see Kaegi, "Initial Byzantine Reactions to the Arab Invasions," 139–42.

⁸¹That George should neglect to mention the Byzantine disaster at Yarmuk is hardly surprising; after all, he was in the business of praising his patron, not writing history, and certainly not recording his patron's defeat. He was, moreover, quite consistent in his blithe forgetfulness of unpleasant events. Thus, in the *Avaric War*, 123–24, he completely ignored the disastrous first decade of Heraclius' reign in which the east had been lost to the Persians and the Balkans to the Avars, and simply wrote, "One must indeed be silent about the extent of our sufferings, for you know that speaking of suffering is to suffer."

⁷⁷See A. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, trans. H. Hionides (Amsterdam, 1968–72), I, 312–14; II, 46–50.

⁷⁸*Hex.*, 1855–58:

Αὐξησον αὐτῷ τοῦ φόβου σου τὸ κράτος·
οὕτω γὰρ ἔξει πιστὰ νικητήρια
νίκης κατ' ἐχθρῶν ἀξιωθεὶς δευτέρως,
ὥς τοὺς ἀδύλους πυρπολήσας βαρβάρους.

tory to another no less traditional and, for Heraclius especially, sensitive issue. The final lines of Sergius' invocation call upon God to bless the emperor's dynasty, and insure its continuation and success:

Finally, plant in him your flowering branches for the living fruit of universal fruitfulness. Make them the images of their father, for thus in them will his power be doubled. Sharpen their swords against the barbarians when they raise their barbaric swords against us. Extend their thoughts toward salvation; humble all hostile arrogance for them, open for them the doors of peace; lighten for them their heavy anxieties.⁸²

Sergius asks God to bless the children of Heraclius and grant them the same favor as their father. The children, moreover, are not simply addressed as the offspring of their father, but as Heraclius' imperial successors.⁸³ The repeated calls for victory against the barbarians, their roles as the creators of peace, and their weighty anxieties are all rhetorical clichés directly associated with imperial rule. Furthermore, George refers to Heraclius' successors in the plural, and explains that there are *two* successors, "For thus in them will his [Heraclius'] power be doubled." The plural succession is significant, for it implies that Heraclius has two successors, a situation that arose only after the coronation of Heraclonas in July of 638.

The poem thus leaves little doubt that two successors are meant. Certainly it is possible, if the "second victory" is not against the Arabs, that the poem could refer to the crowning of Heraclonas as Caesar in 632, but the dignity of Caesar was a good deal inferior to that of Augustus, and George would hardly have raised a Caesar to equality with an Augustus.⁸⁴ The distinction between the two of-

fices and their occupants is most clearly illustrated in Heraclius' coin iconography from 632–641. Heraclius' solidus issues celebrating the coronation of Heraclonas as Caesar distinguish his crown from that of his brother and father, the Augusti.⁸⁵ It is only when Heraclonas is crowned Augustus in 638 that his insignia is made equivalent to the other Augusti.⁸⁶ Moreover, George himself was perfectly capable of describing only one son, the elder son, as Heraclius' heir. In poems written *after* the Persian War, *On the Resurrection of Christ*,⁸⁷ and in his short poem *On the Emperor Constantine*,⁸⁸ George lavished the traditional praises reserved for an heir on Constantine, for only Constantine was Heraclius' heir. Thus it is highly unlikely that the *Hexaemeron*'s praise of Heraclius' twin heirs was written while Heraclonas was still a Caesar. On the contrary, the use of the plural and the "doubled" power of Heraclius' sons strongly implies two Augusti, and such a situation did not arise until July 638.

Sergius' long speech acclaiming the divine and imperial rulers, fathers and sons, ends with this invocation on behalf of Heraclius' heirs. The mise-en-scène for a speech invoking the favor of God might reasonably be a liturgy, and one at which Heraclius and his two heirs both stood at the altar to receive the special blessing of the patriarch. How common such ceremonies were in seventh-century Byzantium cannot be ascertained, but the *Book of Ceremonies* has preserved two such occasions from the reign of Heraclius.⁸⁹ However, George's description of the patriarch, which follows the invocation, is rather unusual:

The patriarch proclaims and says these words, even if his voice is weak from fasting, and although not speaking, it resounds greatly within; setting his voice in the fire of his heart, he hides it, and rather, is muted. He shouts silently, like the throat of Moses, and he is heard, not stirring his lips, and he stains the earth, it rains from his eyes . . . And we are aware of him, even if he is not aware of us. He is manifest, although he releases his lower vision, and extends all his thoughts above.⁹⁰

⁸² *Hex.*, 1859–68:

Ῥίζωσον αὐτῷ τοὺς ἐπανθοῦντας κλάδους,
εἰς ζῶντα καρπὸν κοσμηκῆς εὐκαρπίας.
Ποίησον αὐτοὺς πατρὸς εἰκονίσματα·
οὕτω γὰρ αὐτοῖς διττὸν ἔσται τὸ κράτος,
ὄξυνον αὐτοῖς τὰ ξίφη πρὸς βαρβάρους,
ὅτε πρὸς ἡμᾶς βαρβαροῦνται τὰ ξίφη.
Ἐκτεινον αὐτοῖς εἰς τὸ σῶσαι τὰς φρένας·
σύστειλον αὐτοῖς πᾶν ἐναντίον θράσος·
πλάτυνον αὐτοῖς τὰς πρὸς εἰρήνην πύλας,
στένυνον αὐτοῖς τὰς ἐπαχθεῖς φροντίδας.

⁸³ Compare this description of Heraclius' children with those of *Per. Exp.*, 3.126–28; *Bon.*, 116–21; *Her.*, 1.166–68. In the earlier works, the children are generally characterized as young dependents who have not yet assumed imperial authority. An exception is in *Avar.*, 535–41, where George offers felicitations for Constantine's engagement to his cousin Gregoria, refers to him as "the new emperor," and, even more significantly, offers him generic hopes of victory. Victory is, in fact, the cliché that distinguishes successor from imperial offspring.

⁸⁴ See E. Kornemann, *Doppelprinzipat und Reichsteilung im Imperium Romanum* (Leipzig-Berlin, 1930), 156–57, 162–63.

⁸⁵ P. Grierson, *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, II.1 (Washington, D.C., 1968), 84, 257, pl. ix.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 259, pl. ix. Curiously, Heraclonas appears as Augustus in the coins a year early, a difficulty that has yet to be explained; see also W. Hahn, *Moneta imperii byzantini*, III (Vienna, 1981), 85–86.

⁸⁷ *Res.*, 112–29.

⁸⁸ *Georgii Pisidae carmina inedita*, ed. L. Sternbach, *WSt* 14 (Vienna, 1892), 56.

⁸⁹ See Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De ceremoniis aulae byzantinae*, Bonn ed., II, 627–29.

⁹⁰ *Hex.*, 1869–80:

Ὁ πατριάρχης τὰυτα κράζει καὶ λέγει,

George's description of Sergius' weak voice has no parallel in George's poetry, and it is odd that he should include it here as Sergius invokes God's blessings. He explains that fasting is its cause, and every religious patriarch should fast, but again, George, who lavished much praise on Sergius in his career, rarely praised his asceticism. At any event, such praise of Sergius' asceticism is out of place here. George's description of his delivery, in fact, rather conflicts with the tenor of his speech; the words of the patriarch should be loudly broadcast, his praises should be heard and acclaimed by all the citizens. Corippus, for example, used Patriarch John as a "herald" for Justin II: "The greatest of bishops, John, blessed him [Justin II] as he stood there and praying to the Lord of heaven he asked him to sanctify the head of the emperor with the holy diadem. . . . A sudden shout rang out from the Senators, and the cries of the subjects grew."⁹¹ On the contrary, Sergius "shouts silently," withdrawn from the world around him.

If the description of Sergius' fasting and inability to speak is drawn from life, which given its peculiarity is not unreasonable, then it is possible that illness or the effects of Sergius' age might explain it. The coronation of Heraclonas as Augustus occurred in July 638, and Sergius' death in December of the same year; if Heraclonas was indeed Augustus at the time of the *Hexaemeron's* composition, it is possible that the *Hexaemeron*, as considerable a commission as it was, was not completed until after Sergius' death. George's final words about Sergius, "And we are aware of him, even if he is not aware of us. He is manifest, although he releases his lower vision, and extends all his thoughts above," seems suspiciously like a eulogy, and again, is an unusual description of Sergius who generally in George is very much the public figure.⁹²

Nonetheless, whether George's peculiar description of Sergius has a physical basis or not, Sergius'

function as a ceremonial "herald" for Heraclius, like Patriarch John for Justin II, probably reflects court ceremonial, possibly even a coronation. Such at least is his function in the coronations of the *Book of Ceremonies*, for nearly all the emperors included a liturgy in their coronations, and, in the case of Heraclonas, Sergius' praying for Heraclius and his children is specifically mentioned.⁹³ Naturally, the patriarch accompanied the emperor and his family on numerous occasions other than a coronation, and the *Book of Ceremonies* does not lack such an example from Heraclius' own reign.⁹⁴ If Heraclonas was emperor at the poem's composition, however, the ceremonial opportunities for Sergius and the imperial family are somewhat limited, since Sergius died less than six months later, and it is possible that the coronation of Heraclonas might have been the ceremonial setting that George had in mind.

At any event, the *Hexaemeron's* cycle of creation and cosmic renewal was assimilated by George not only for the "hexaemeron" of imperial restoration in the Persian War, but for dynastic purposes as well. The creation of the world by the Father through the Son was not an inappropriate metaphor for welcoming Heraclonas into a dynastic triad. Indeed, as the first emperor successfully to leave his throne to a son since Arcadius, almost two and a half centuries earlier, Heraclius did not have a recent dynastic model to adopt; he had earlier either rejected or ignored Maurice's dynastic numismatic iconography.⁹⁵ Above all, Heraclius seems to have drawn on whatever renewal motives he could find, and the *Hexaemeron* fits Heraclius' dynastic rhetoric. The emphasis on renewal throughout Heraclius' court rhetoric probably is reflected in the early coinage of Heraclonas or Constans II, whose coins bore the legend *ANANEOS* (sic), renewal, in honor of the emperor's dynastic claims that Heraclius was renewed in his descendant.⁹⁶

κἂν ἔστιν ἰσχνόφωνος ἕξ αἰτίας,
καὶ μὴ λαλῶν ἤχησεν ἔνδοθεν μέγα.
τὴν γλῶτταν ἐνθεῖς εἰς τὸ πῦρ τῆς καρδίας,
ἔκρυσεν αὐτήν, καὶ στομοῦται μειζόνως·
βοᾷ δὲ σιγῶν, ὡς ὁ Μωσέως φάρυγξ·
ἀκούεται δὲ μὴ σαλεύων τὸ στόμα.
τέγγει δὲ τὴν γῆν, καὶ δι' ὀμμάτων βρέχει,
καὶ πυκνὰ νείφει τῇ φορᾷ τῶν δακρῶν.
Ἔγνομεν αὐτόν, κἂν δοκεῖ λεληθέναι·
δηλὸς γὰρ ἦν, τὸ βλέμμα χαννώσας κάτω,
καὶ τοὺς λογισμοὺς πάντας ἐκτείνας ἄνω.

⁹¹ Corippus, *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris*, ed. and trans. Av. Cameron (London, 1976), 52.

⁹² *Hex.*, 1869–80; compare with the more conventional praise of Sergius in *Hex.*, 32–50; for the public persona of Sergius, see *Avar.*, 182–89 and especially 312–27, where Sergius inspires the defense of Constantinople against the Avars.

⁹³ See *De cerimoniis*, 410–11, 414–15 for Leo I; *ibid.*, 432 for Leo II; *ibid.*, 422 for Anastasius; *ibid.*, 428–29 for Justin I; *ibid.*, 433 for Justinian I; *ibid.*, 627–28 for Heraclonas.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 628–29.

⁹⁵ See note 74 above.

⁹⁶ It is unclear whether the coins in question belong to Heraclonas or Constans II; see Grierson, *Catalogue*, II.2, 391–94; Hahn, *Moneta*, III, 135–40. The use of *ANANEOS* should not be thought to be simply a Greek abbreviation of the Latin legend *RESTITUTOR ORBIS* or some such similar legend. In the first place, there was certainly room on the coin to inscribe *KOS-MOU* had that been the engraver's intention. But even more, the dynastic miscues that accompanied the accession of Heraclonas and Constans II (not to mention the similar iconographic confusion raised by the number of sons of Constans II that appeared on his coins) created a need to establish a clear claim to the throne as the renewer of the dynasty.

The *Hexaemeron*, therefore, was not a “theological” work, nor was its intent and design anything but political. Its date, well after the terminal date, the early 630s, that scholars have traditionally assigned to George, shows how, in the wake of the Arab invasions and in the midst of dynastic confusion, Byzantine panegyric could ignore disaster or feign blithe optimism. Quite conceivably, the Byzantines did not recognize the extent of the disaster at the Yarmuk, and held onto their expectations of recovery. But whatever the prevailing mood among the defeated, George’s poetry offers only the most obscure glimpse into Byzantine responses to the Arabs’ victories.

Byzantine scholars, convinced that there was an “age of spirituality,” can anachronistically apply the category of “theology” to George’s hardly subtle political metaphors because the vocabulary of the metaphors includes religious denotations. The anachronistic distinction between “theological” works and “panegyric” works is a distinction that rests on modern idealizations of the religious life of the Byzantine court. Religious belief may

have sustained Heraclius’ morale, but it did not resolve the military and political dilemmas of his reign. The religious patina of George’s work should remind us that the Byzantines were masters at misleading the unwary with their polished rhetoric. There was no sudden florescence of George’s “spiritual” persona that the emergency of the Persian War had suppressed. On the contrary, the *Hexaemeron*, whose “creation” themes so closely echo George’s earlier work, was designed and executed to meet the same panegyric and political needs of George’s patron that his earlier poetry had. The fact that the same religious metaphors were adopted in the *Hexaemeron* as in George’s later “panegyric” works should not make us think that religion did not or could not serve the needs of hard political realities, or that even sincere religious belief would prevent politicians from manipulating religious symbols for political advantage. Byzantium’s entire history demonstrates otherwise.

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